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On Regrouping a Combined-Arms Army from the Depth
of the Country in the Initial Period of a War

by

Major-General P. Stepshin

From the very beginning of a future war there will be a requirement for the stepping up of the efforts of the operating fronts with troops being moved up from the depth. Not only individual units and large units, but also whole formations, will be moved up to the line of the front. The demand for this may result from the need to create strong groupings in short periods of time to develop an offensive, to deliver counterstrikes or to go over to a counteroffensive, to close large gaps which have formed, and to replace troops who have been weakened or who have lost their combat effectiveness.

In recent years considerable experience has been accumulated from exercises in the organization and carrying out of regroupings of a combined-arms army from the depth of a country in the initial period of a war, in different theaters of military operations and in different situations. Thus, in one of the exercises in the North Caucasus Military District, a combined-arms army consisting of a missile brigade, and of one tank and four motorized rifle divisions, moved 1,400 to 1,600 km in the first days of the war to participate in the fulfilment of the further task of a front attacking in a mountain theater. The regrouping was carried out by crossing a mountain ridge along one railroad and three highway axes. A large part of the troops (up to 80 percent) moved under their own power, and the remainder by railroad, air, and water transportation. The army was sent into battle on the seventh day after beginning its forward movement.

In another exercise, an army with the same complement and the same assignment moved 1,000 to 1,200 km across territory with a developed road network and was sent into battle in five days. About 40 percent of the complement

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of the army moved by railroad, up to 45 percent moved under their own power, and about 15 percent of the whole volume of transportation fell to the lot of air transport.

The procedure and time for moving troops within the complement of an army during a regrouping can be most varied. Together with this, an analysis of the experience of exercises and games reveals a number of general laws characterizing the conditions and methods of organizing and conducting the regrouping of a combined-arms army from the depth of the country in the initial period of a nuclear/missile war.

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The law of nuclear/missile warfare, formulated by N. S. Khrushchev, which states that from the very beginning of an armed conflict the primary efforts of both sides are aimed at the depth of the hostile camp, is bringing about basic changes in the conditions for moving troops and will give a new character to regroupings.

Troops and communications will now be subjected to enemy action at any distance from the front. The scale and effectiveness of this action have increased immeasurably. It is sufficient to note that the probable enemy can take special measures at the beginning of a war to upset the movement of reserves forward from the depth of the country by setting up so-called "nuclear obstruction barriers" along the natural lines intersecting the basic lines of communication. Simultaneously, a large number of nuclear strikes can be delivered against troops, road junctions, stations, tunnels, ports, and wharves.

Judging by the exercises held, for struggle against reserves moving up in the most important theaters of military operations, the command of NATO envisages the use of a large number of nuclear warheads, of thousands of aircraft, of bacterial and toxic chemical agents, of airborne forces, and of specially trained and equipped sabotage groups and detachments. This is also taken into consideration in our command games and operational exercises.

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Thus, during one of the military command games, during the first two days of the war alone, the "enemy" delivered 19 ground and 3 air nuclear strikes against the lines of communication of our troops. Calculations showed that even such relatively small action by the "enemy" resulted in the radioactive contamination of large areas. Moreover, as a result of the nuclear strikes, 9 railroad junctions, whose restoration took 4 to 14 days, were destroyed. The railroad network was broken up into 6 isolated sections. Of two through railroad lines leading toward the front, one was put out of action for a prolonged period, and the other was subjected to constant action by "enemy" sabotage groups and detachments. The total carrying capacity of the railroads decreased by 60 percent, and the length of the route for the greater part of the military echelons increased twofold and more. As the result of the destruction of a hydrotechnical installation, terrain over an area of 200 by 25 km was flooded. Very important highway junctions were also destroyed, and the roads themselves became clogged with streams of people and civilian transportation.

In a short time the forces and weapons of the army had to be brought in to ensure the continuation of its regrouping, which was in progress—to carry out engineer work to overcome the obstacles which had appeared and to restore the roads, to carry out antiair defense and protection against atomic and chemical attack, to eliminate the consequences of the "enemy" nuclear attack, to increase sharply the commandant's service and the regulation of traffic, to destroy "enemy" sabotage groups and landings, and also to wage a struggle against isolated groupings of his troops which remained in the rear of the attacking front in the zone near the border.

Further "enemy" action against lines of communication and against troops moving up turned out to be so effective that it threatened the regrouping with possible failure. Special measures had to be taken to provide reliable support for the troops moving up.

The need for fire support of the regrouping was already felt during the past war. However, at that time, it amounted

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to passive measures, mainly to the antiair defense of troops and lines of communication. Now this is no longer sufficient. To ensure the movement of large reserves from the zone of interior, operational nuclear/missile means must be actively combatted and strikes must be delivered against his airfields. This combat will be waged in the framework of the general plan of the General Headquarters of the Supreme High Command for the gaining of fire superiority in the initial period of a war. At the same time, the planning and carrying out of the fire support of troops moving up must become an important duty for a front and even for an army.

Consequently, the regrouping of an army from the rear to the front -- something which formerly had the nature of "peacetime transportation" and which was frequently connected only with the expenditure of time, vehicle resources, and fuel -- has now been transformed into a distinctive combat operation whose purpose, after active and constant enemy counteraction has been overcome, is to maintain the combat effectiveness of the troops and build up the complement of the front to the grouping necessary for the performance of the new task. During a regrouping, the troops will now cease to be simply passengers being transported from one area to another. They will be forced to overcome various obstacles along the paths of their movement and to cross contaminated sectors of terrain, to take active measures to upset or to decrease enemy pressure to a maximum, and, in several instances, to eliminate the consequences of his nuclear strikes.

The definition of regrouping as a combat operation shows sufficiently fully the qualitative change which it has undergone in connection with the shift in the center of gravity of armed struggle to the depth of the belligerents, reflects the essence of the process of moving troops under modern conditions, and favors the correct solution of a number of problems connected with the organization of regrouping.

The different methods in which it can be carried out are also in keeping with the changed nature of regrouping.

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Methods of moving troops which are not connected with the use of the large, permanent transportation installations most subject to enemy action and which ensure reliable regrouping and maintenance of the combat effectiveness of the troops, are acquiring very great significance. Among these are the following: moving an army as a whole by air transportation, with the loading and unloading of troops and equipment at temporary field airfields, combined regrouping with the comprehensive use of various types of transportation, with the predominant role given to movement under their own power, and the movement of all the forces of an army under their own power. We believe that the last method will become the most widespread in regroupings over a distance of up to 1,000 km, i.e., in the zone where the enemy will use his main weapons in his nuclear offensive.

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Under modern conditions it is necessary to examine afresh the regrouping of an army, in connection with its subsequent commitment to battle. In the past, the sequence and procedure for regrouping had little dependence on the nature of the operational task which the army had to accomplish within the complement of a front. In the majority of cases, after its movement an army spent a prolonged time in the build-up area, where it also prepared to conduct the operation.

At the present time, the high speeds of development of operations, the desire to increase its efforts as quickly as possible and to achieve surprise, the mass destruction of communications, and also the threat of the destruction of a concentrated army by enemy nuclear/missile strikes, make it inadvisable for the army to remain in a build-up area for a long time, except in certain cases when it is necessary to create a new grouping of troops, for example, in preparing a counteroffensive along a given axis.

The experience of exercises shows that a tendency to transform the regrouping and the commitment to battle of an army from two independent and relatively unrelated acts into a single process, connected by a general plan,

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and by the continuity of operations, is already appearing. There is every reason to suppose that, as the speed of regroupings and of the operations of ground troops increases, this law will manifest itself even more strongly. This results from the fact that the organization and procedure for regrouping prove to depend increasingly on the nature of the operational task which the army will have to accomplish within the complement of a front. However, for the proper organization of troop movement, there is more and more need for timely determination and knowledge of this task.

It is sometimes said that in the strained and dynamic situation of the initial period of a war, it will be impossible to determine in advance the nature of the task which an army will accomplish after regrouping within the complement of a front. Of course, sudden and abrupt changes in the situation during this time are quite possible. On this basis, however, it is impossible to gainsay the advisability of planning the first army operations and army regroupings from the depth of the country before the war starts.

It should be borne in mind that under modern conditions, in contrast to the last war, the number of armies within the complement of a front may be somewhat smaller. In connection with this, there is the increasing possibility of determining the tasks of each army in good time. Moreover, in the majority of cases the development of an offensive by the troops of a front will be carried out, we suppose, by the reinforcement of the armies of the first echelon with individual large units from the front's reserve. The commitment of a whole army to battle must be considered a rare phenomenon, and the general nature of the task of such an army can be determined in advance.

For example, in one of the exercises, the need to commit an army to battle arose from the fact that a new, important operational axis had appeared in the depth of "enemy" territory. In another instance, an army was committed to battle after troops of the first echelon of the front had traversed a narrow defile between two water barriers. In both instances, the operational tasks of the armies being committed in the impending army operations were determined in advance.

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Sometimes it will be possible to orient an army in the most probable variants of its use in general terms only, but even this will assist in the purposeful organization of troop movement.

Depending on the length of the period of threat (ugrozhayemyy period), the periods of mobilization, the complement and assignment of the army, and the distance and speed of the regrouping, an army can arrive in the complement of the front at various stages of its first or subsequent operations, and, if the period of threat is of sufficient duration, before the beginning of military operations and at the beginning of the war it will be in the first echelon, or will comprise the second echelon of the front.

An army which is constantly deployed at a distance of no more than 1,000 to 1,500 km from the line of the front, and which succeeds in completing its mobilization before the beginning of military operations or which is in a state of constant readiness, will be able to join the complement of the front (if it is not moved by air) approximately as the fulfilment of the subsequent task of the first front operation is beginning, i.e., on the fifth to seventh day of the war.

It is most probable that mobilization will begin only on the eve, and sometimes at the beginning, of the war. In this case, an army which is moving forward while regrouping at a distance exceeding 1,000 to 1,500 km will be able to participate only in the second and subsequent operations of a front. Guaranteeing the participation of this army in the first front operation is a very complicated task, which can be accomplished only by moving the troops by air.

We now have such military transport aircraft as the AN-8, AN-12, IL-18, TU-104, and the MI-6 helicopter, which are able to transport by air the personnel and organic means of a motorized rifle division of modern organization (without tanks).

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Calculations show that 4 to 5 divisions of military transport aviation can transport an entire motorized rifle division in two trips over a distance of 2,000 km in two days. From this, one can see that basically, modern military transport means already meet requirements for the movement of troops over large distances. When this aviation is equipped with AN-22 aircraft, it will be able to transport motorized rifle and tank divisions and missile and other units in full complement by air.

However, this does not exclude the need for the further improvement of military transport aviation. For example, we must have aircraft able to carry loads of 30 to 50 tons, with a maximum speed of about 800 kph, and with a flight range of 5,000 to 8,000 kms, which can take off and land on dirt airfields of limited size. There is also a great future for autocraft (turbolet), combining the characteristics of a helicopter and an automobile and able to move on the ground as well as in the air.

An important problem is that of decreasing the time between regrouping and committing an army to combat. As has already been noted, the simultaneous commitment of all or of a large part of the forces of an army which is moving up will now be a very rare phenomenon. There is now no sense in keeping all the troops of an army in definite areas until they have been fully concentrated. Firstly, such a grouping would be a good target for enemy nuclear strikes and could cause great losses; secondly, the presence of an army in the build-up area for several days will result in its separation from the troops operating over a considerable area ahead, and this will not ensure the timely stepping-up of the efforts of the first echelon of the front.

As has been shown by the experience of exercises, the one or two divisions which are in contact with the enemy will usually be again subordinated to an army being committed to battle after regrouping, and at first, only a part of the complement of arriving troops may be committed to battle -- a missile brigade and three, two, or even one division with the necessary means for reinforcement. As a rule, these divisions will be committed to battle on separate axes and at a different depth as they approach

IRONBARK

and deploy for combat.

Therefore, under the conditions which have been examined, the readiness of an army for commitment to battle must be determined not by the completion of the concentration of all its forces, but by the time of the arrival in the new areas of its large units which have been assigned for operations in the first echelon of the army. On exercises this made it possible for us to reduce the time between the beginning of regrouping and the commitment of an army to battle by almost three days.

In connection with the conceptions which have been expressed, the procedure for assigning the task of regrouping to an army is also changing. For example, in the majority of instances the designation of a build-up area is losing its meaning because in practice there will be no such build-up; the large units of the first echelon of the army will enter battle abruptly, while the remainder, trying not to lag behind the troops operating ahead, will also continue the movement, in readiness to develop the offensive.

It seems to us that, under the conditions which have been examined, instead of indicating an area and a time for the conclusion of the build-up of an army, it would be preferable to specify the area and time at which commitment to battle should be begun and ended and also the forces by which this commitment should be carried out and supported.

Also, in allotting tasks to the army's large units, there is no need to specify build-up areas. Bearing in mind that these large units will enter combat abruptly, and frequently not simultaneously, they should be given only the limits of deployment (commitment).

Allocation of tasks in this way corresponds more fully to the modern understanding of commitment to battle and to its coordination with regrouping, allows maximum use of the limited capabilities of existing means of communication for the forward movement of large units in

IRONBARK

the most advisable sequence, and reduces the time needed to move and create the necessary grouping of forces and weapons.

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Preparation for moving an army from the depth of the country begins even before war starts. In this process, its assignment and complement are determined, together with the zone of its movement, the times for mobilizing and regrouping, the requisite transport and support means, and the procedure for their use. At the same time, measures are taken to maintain the constant high state of mobilization and march readiness of the troops. In accordance with the assignment of the army and with possible changes in the state of the lines of communication and transportation, several variants of the regrouping plan are worked out.

Under the conditions of nuclear/missile warfare, however, the significance of this prewar planning should not be exaggerated. The experience of exercises shows that the very first enemy nuclear/missile strikes can so substantially alter the periods for mobilizing troops, the state of the lines of communication, and their traffic capacity, that only basic elements of the prewar plan will retain their significance. Therefore, the greater part of the work on the organization of the forward movement will be done not ahead of time but immediately before the very beginning of regrouping, in extremely compressed periods of time, often under enemy action, while the consequences of his strikes are being eliminated, and simultaneously with the conduct of mobilization measures.

So that the army commander and staff will be able to accomplish their tasks successfully under these complicated conditions, we must first of all ensure the rapid collection of information on the situation. For this, specifically, a single system must be worked out for notifying troops about the radiation situation, using all the means of reconnaissance, subunits and units of the chemical troops, local organs of civil defense, and the network of the hydro-meteorological service. We must also resolve the